

Using 1984 in social reasoning.

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First of all, I must confess that I am not at all a specialist of Orwell. I had not even read it in English until I had to write this paper. My first research interest is in moral and political sociology and especially the sociology of justice conceptions.

But when I discovered the call for paper issued by this ECPR congress, I had just presented a seminar to a group of militants involved in what we call in French the “altermondialist” movement. I was wondering if the constant reference to “1984” in discourse about the world as it goes, and especially about globalization, could really throw light on the way things happen.

To do this I rested on a comparison between two novels, uneven in quality and reputation, but each of which can be viewed as a paradigmatic description of a socio-political nightmare for the contemporary world. The first is of course *1984* itself, while the second is *The Sheep Look Up*, a novel by the science-fiction writer John Brunner, published for the first time in 1972, at a time when the acronym SF was supposed to mean “speculative fiction”.

So I wondered if I should not try, if the opportunity were given to me, to submit those rather sketchy ideas to a public that is both specialized in politics and in the work of Orwell ? Of course I intended to re-elaborate those ideas to give them a more academic form. No need to say, as it happens very often, this re-elaboration was not pushed too far : I was overwhelmed by more prosaic research and teaching tasks and what I will present to you is not very remote from what I presented to my earlier public, excepted for the last part. However, schematic as they are, those ideas will hopefully generate a fruitful discussion.

As I already told you, my reading will rather be a “first degree” reading because I assume that the ideological success of *1984* rests on such a reading. And the success of *The Sheep Look Up* could have gained rests on it too.

1984

Let us now turn to the first step of my argument : what are the most typical characteristics of the 1984 society as Orwell describes it ? And what is their link with equivalent characteristics of our own society ?

- First of all, it is a *collectivist society*. This characteristic appears in every part of the novel but it's never better expressed than when O'Brien says to Winston : “ *Alone – free – the human being is doomed to die, which is the greatest of all failures; but if he can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he is the party, then he is all-powerful and immortal* ” (p. 277)

Now, how can we see this fusional conception as a possible nightmare for our own society ? It seems completely at odds with our most probable future as it has been viewed by almost every social scientist, every philosopher or every essayist for at least the last 25 years. I think insisting on this would not be very useful. So how can we reconcile the fundamentally collectivist trait of Orwell's novel with one of the most powerful characteristics of our own society : the individualizing trend ?

A first strategy could be to assume that collectivism is not an *essential trait* of the society described by the novel. This option seems to me untenable. But as I said, I'm not a specialist and I'm open to argument on this point. But should anyone be able to make this demonstration, this person would still not get rid of the burden of proof : he or she would still have to demonstrate that collectivism is not an essential trait for people who read *1984* or for teachers who use it with their pupils. This second choice seems to me equally untenable.

A second strategy would be to assume that collectivism is not essential to the *moral lesson* we draw from the novel (and when I say “we”, I refer mainly to lay people). There are more possibilities available here. The first one would be to use an argument put forward by Robert Nisbet¹, who says that totalitarianism is not mainly an attack against the individual but rather an attempt to destroy the social links which allow individuals to develop. If this is the case, what is essential here is not the resistance of individuals as such but the solidarity between Winston and Julia, which is destroyed by torture. The second possibility is to use psychoanalytical arguments, as does for instance François Brune,² who says that what is at stake is the “conquest” of the self : it is because Winston has not investigated his fear of rats that he can be manipulated by O'Brien.

Whatever may be thought of those arguments, they refer to the struggle of free will against power. And it seems to me evident that this question must be addressed in very different ways in a collectivist and in an individualist society. This would require a rather long argument. But I think the problem of free will in contemporary society is very well captured by the simple idea, defended for instance by Anthony Giddens or Ulrich Beck, that in a

¹ Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*; quoted in Benjamin Barber, *Démocratie forte* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997 [1984]).

² François Brune, *Sous le soleil de Big Brother. Précis sur « 1984 » à l'usage des années 2000* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

detraditionalized society choice becomes a burden for individuals who can count on no or very little social help³.

This would of course require a much longer demonstration, but it seems difficult to escape the contradiction : the collectivist nature of 1984's society seems to be a substantial trait both of the described society and of the moral lesson we can draw from the novel and it therefore hardly seems efficient to use the novel in order to describe the "nightmare" of our own society, which is growing more and more individualistic.

- A second trait which is at odds with the spirit of our time is the puritanism that reigns in Oceania. Even Winston may himself be charged of puritanism, given the fact that sex is mainly a way to express political opposition. The only character who can escape the accusation is Julia, who views sex as a matter of pleasure, irrespective of the attitude of the party on this subject.

Again, we could say that puritanism is not an essential trait of either Oceanian society or of the moral lesson we can draw from the novel. I will not insist on this, but the simple fact that Winston and Julia are arrested on the basis of the accusation that they have unauthorized sexual relations seems to preclude any attempt at such an interpretation.

Nor will I deny that the permissiveness of our own society may sometimes have little to do with the development of a free, harmonious and egalitarian sexuality. Nevertheless, the contrast is striking between a society (that of Orwell) in which sexuality is almost totally repressed and another (ours) in which it is everywhere, be it in the form of commercial goods or services. Even if this contrast is open to all kinds of refinements, I don't see how the "first degree" reading of 1984, which I use here as a basis for my discussion, could treat this difference as incidental.

- The society of 1984 is an anti-scientific society. The difficulties which various masculine characters experience simply to find a razor blade are a recurring motif. Techniques are progressively lost and technical devices, if they are not devoted to war or surveillance, have ceased to be ameliorated. Worse : sometimes they are disappearing altogether.

Needless to say, nothing could be more remote from our own society than a anti-scientist society. On the contrary, our day-to-day life rests on very powerful abstract systems in which we are so embedded that we cease to see them. But the smooth operation of those systems is so important that a crisis may actually threaten what Giddens calls our "ontological security"⁴.

But there is a more ambiguous point here : Orwell's society is anti-scientific because it is world '*en trompe l'oeil*', a false world the reality of which is dubious : is there really a war ? Is there really anything else than Oceania ? O'Brien defends against Winston a purely idealist view of reality, which he calls "collective solipsism". *Things* do not matter, he says, the true power is *power over men*. This view partly resembles a certain kind of postmodern stance which denies the importance of "objective" reality. So the idealism of O'Brien may have a taste of some (intellectual) traits of our own society.

³ Anthony Giddens : *Modernity and Self-Identity* (London: Polity Press, 2001 [1991])

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Les conséquences de la modernité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994 [1990]).

But there is a major difference : those theses are defended, in our society, in a world full of objects, which become more sophisticated, numerous and diverse day after day. In our society, we could say that power over men is what matters, but power is exercised *through things* so that the control of technology is a very decisive feature.

Our nightmare is not a nightmare about disappearing technology. Rather, it is the fear of a society which is overwhelmed by the technology it has produced. And this is the opposite of *1984*.

- I think we could continue in this way for many more pages. In order not to be too long, I will just add a last point to my comparison, about the way in which time is grasped both in *1984* and in contemporary society.

1984 is a world of eternity. At least, such is the project of its leaders: to project a world in which nothing seems to change, while the past is continuously reconstructed to maintain this view of an everlasting fixed history in which nothing ever happens. By contrast, our society is continuously on the move. Of course we could say that continuous movement is ultimately the same thing as no movement at all because there isn't any reference left. But I think this would not be true of contemporary society. Our society, probably due to its fast rhythm of change, is very interested in its past. So we have a permanent reconstruction, but less as an eternal present than as a society which is more and more desirous of finding its place in history.

After these four arguments, my point should be clear enough : a "first degree reading" of *1984* disqualifies the view that the model of society developed in the novel figures as a possible nightmare for our own society.

The sheep look up.

To develop the argument a little further, I would like to present what I consider a much more convincing fictional representation of our society's worst nightmares. As I said, this novel is called *The Sheep Look Up*, and it is part of a tetralogy in which John Brunner describes what is for him the main threat, if not against human life as such, at least against civilized human life.

The story of Brunner is much less linear : it weaves together a diversity of storylines, which ultimately converge towards a unique focal point. This focal point is in itself rather anecdotal: it is the precise moment when the world lapses in the nightmare, though we guess throughout the book that the nightmare was from the beginning unavoidable.

As the book was written in 1972 and evokes a near future, the story could very well take place in 1984.

The world at that time has changed but in a way it resembles more, it seems to me, the future we can evoke from now on. The United States have won the Vietnam war. In fact, Vietnam has almost disappeared under napalm and defoliants, and there's a group of war veterans in the US who dedicate time and money to organizing the adoption of young Vietnamese orphans.

On the other hand, the Tupamaros have seized power in Uruguay and the Tupamaro movement is expanding all through Latin America, especially Mexico. Europe has sunk in its own problems, indeed literally so since the Mediterranean sea has become a dead sea, due to pollution. Africa is a battle-field, just as it is in 1984, excepted that it is now a war between African nations, as various populations from the Mediterranean coast try to descend South and this great move causes wars in Central Africa.

In America, the main obsession is pollution. Oxygen masks are necessary to stay a few hours in town. Illnesses that were previously without great consequences have developed into very serious and resistant forms. Influenza has become a subject of terror and the great obsession of middle-class families is to spare enough money to raise one child until adulthood, due to the very high costs of medical care. Insurances companies are obliged to revise their life insurance policies because, for the first time in the century, life expectancy is diminishing in the United States. Ecological militants are becoming more and more numerous and also more aggressive. Apart from this, the United States are also leading a war against the Tupamaros who try to take power in Mexico, and they are facing terrorist attacks from Mexican Tupamaros in big cities.

Inside this context, the story develops like an unexpected chain of events, one that is very unlikely to happen *a priori* but that will have terrific terrible consequences. To summarize : Jack Bamberley, a tycoon in the oil business, has decided to dedicate part of his benefits to a philanthropic activity. He will produce a very cheap and nutritive food, a kind of pasta called “Nutripon”, fabricated from manioc and distributed throughout Africa thanks to a non-governmental organization. (Sometimes, it is difficult to believe that all this was written in 1972).

But an unexpected event happens : after having consumed a lot of Nutripon, the population in an African city enters into something like a Voodoo trance, in which they experience hallucinations and they begin to kill each other ferociously. At the United Nations some African countries, joined by Uruguay, accuse the US of genocide. In America, the stars of the talk shows are preparing to “strike” thanks to this affair. This is all the more important because, meanwhile, a gigantic epidemic of influenza has been freezing almost all economic activity in North America for one month – which has caused the defeat of the American expeditionary corp fighting the Tupamaros in Mexico.

What has happened ? As we discover only at the end of the story, a lot of Nutripon had been *accidentally* contaminated by a stock of innervating gas, produced some decades before for the US army and forgotten for a long time. But at the moment when the case is being unveiled in Court by an ecologist militant, this same gas is, *still accidentally*, introduced into the reservoir of consumable water of the city of Denver. Hundreds of thousands of mad inhabitants begin to kill each other while, at the same time, in the great cities of California, a terrorist attack by Tupamaros causes gigantic fires. Martial law is voted and America is sinking into a night which, as the reader guesses, is likely to be very long.

Two modes of seeing nightmare.

If I took some time to contrast two novels which have a very different status within the literary tradition, it is because they express two paradigmatic cases of social nightmares and nightmares are, I think, a very important part of what we could call our “social imaginary”. I use here the word “imaginary” in the same sense – if I understand it properly –

as does Cornelius Castoriadis when he speaks of the “radical imaginary”, which is what he calls the degree of total contingency which informs the way in which a specific society develops its view of the world and builds its institutions⁵.

In this sense, the “imaginary” could be defined as a more or less integrated set of representations which allow us to give a *meaning* to the world in which we live. Probably, the imaginary of societies of radical modernity is maximally fragmented : in some sense, each individual has his own. But this fragmentation is of course not absolute : we can identify collective imaginaries as, for instance, political imaginaries. Indeed, around the phenomenon we ordinary call “globalization”, we may identify different kinds of imaginaries engaged in the field of public debates :

- the liberal imaginary – that of *The Economist*, and of the majority of international institutions – sees globalization as some kind of hydraulic system in which water (in fact, richness) must not be prevented from finding its naturel way or it will stagnate, creating putrid marshes.
- the populist imaginary sees globalization as the open door to barbarian hordes ready to invade us and destroy our way of life.
- And for some leftist imaginary, globalization is a plot fomented by the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund of which the sword is the US army.

Thus, just as there are various imaginaries of globalization, there are also several for what we could call *the end of civilization*.

Both novels describe the way civilization comes to an end and, as such, they share at least an imaginary in which there may be such an end (which I suppose the more liberal imaginary would deny). But apart from that, the situation is very different.

- In *1984*, we see a self-conscious and all-powerful caste which exercises total power over the entire population. *Control* is everything in this world and it is very striking that the inner party members have as their main privilege the possibility of escaping from it for a while. Material privileges do not seem to matter a lot and power is exercised for the sake of it. In this world, the re-education of dissidents has no other function than enhancing the perfection of pure domination and it is like an esthetic goal that the inner party would have assign to itself. We are at the peak of a ***fantasy of omnipotence*** where power is a form of mysticism, devoid of any objective outside itself. In *1984* domination is terrifying and total but it seems at the same time very abstract and fragile : should one human being effectively resist, then the whole construction would be jeopardized. Therefore we can understand why O’Brien, an important member of the inner party, can dedicate seven years of his life to watching a man who has no intrinsic importance.
- In the world John Brunner describes in *The Sheep Look Up*, things are totally different. There is domination, of course, the rich are very rich and the powerful are very powerful. But they are *losing control*. They lose control not over people but over events. A striking feature of the novel is that all the powerful characters, including

⁵ Cornélius Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1999 [1975]).

Jack Bamberley himself, die before the end of the story. *The Sheep Look Up* has often been described as some kind of an ecologist manifesto. But the message is of a much more universal kind : it is a warning against the unexpected consequences of human action in a world that is insufficiently regulated. The end of civilization is not the result of omnipotence, but, on the contrary, of **general powerlessness**.

Two views of social mechanisms.

Those two nightmares and their corresponding imaginaries may be linked to two theories of the social world.

- The theory illustrated by *1984* is one that we can call with Popper a **sociological theory of conspiracy** : this means, as Popper puts it, “*the idea that all social phenomena and, among them, those we generally find bad, as war, unemployment, poverty, scarcity, are the direct result of a plan fomented by certain powerful individual or groups*”⁶ . This is anyway the way it is used by those who rely on the novel of Orwell to explain today’s world. My paradigmatical example is that of Ignacio Ramonet, Director and Editorialist of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and its typical phrase, “The masters of the world”. The masters of the world may be different according to the subject (media, corporations, international relationships) but the fact is that there are always such “masters of the world”. Even Pierre Bourdieu, who used to be very close to the constellation revolving around “Le Monde diplomatique”, may subscribe to some sort of conspiracy theory when he writes for instance : “*Big Brother is already there, decides what we are going to drink, think, eat, and he imposes upon us his view of the world*”⁷ .
- the theory of the social which is implicit in John Brunner’s novel is what I would call a **sociological theory of contingency**. It anticipates the great move of social theory during the seventies and eighties that was to rehabilitate the idea, first formulated by Merton in 1936, of the importance of *the unanticipated consequences of purposive social action*. This idea – of which the seed was already sown in the work of great precursors like Tocqueville – is the best way to avoid any conspiracy theory. Indeed it can explain at the same time why social phenomena may seem intuitively very strange or very harmful without supposing any individual or collective intentionality. Social opacity is not due to the will of some people or organized group to hide reality but to the unpredictability of the outcome of a great number of intentional and rational interactions between people.

I am by and large a tenant of this theory, of which the explanatory power seems to me very strong, and which has the great merit of avoiding the necessity of referring to any all-powerful group or individual, be they hidden or not.

So when I presented this conference in front of my public of “altermondialists”, my aim was to question the way *1984* is used in their discourses, because it eventually helps to reinforce a conspiracist view of the world.

⁶ Extract from *Conjecture et réfutations* (Paris: Payot, to be completed). My translation.

⁷ Extract from *Contre-feux* , To be checked. My translation

But what's wrong with conspiracy theory ?

This is precisely the question I was not prepared to address. I had always considered conspiracy theories as, at best, a last resort intent to give meaning to a very complex, uneven and unjust world, without the necessity of a reference to God. So, from the point of view of social sciences, it could be viewed as mere fantasy, ideology, or whatever similar belief, but not as a candidate to scientific explanation.

So, I decided to leave scientific reasons aside for a while, assuming that there are good *normative* reasons to reject conspiracy theory, at least from the point of view of the public I had in front of me. In my opinion, there are at least two normative points that can be made against any theory of “the Masters of the world”.

- The first reason is that it leaves the opponents hopelessly disarmed, because the “Masters of the world” are viewed in such a way that there is no point in trying to resist. In that discourse, there is undoubtedly a *1984* flavour. In Orwell’s novel O’Brien is all-powerful because he is also *omniscient*. And for that, Winston admires him : *O’Brien was a being in all ways larger than himself. There was no idea that he had ever had, or could have, that O’Brien had not long ago known, examined and rejected. His mind contained Winston’s mind*”⁸. Even for François Brune, who cannot himself be exonerated from the suspicion of sharing this “masters of the world” view, this is the great weakness of Winston : he cannot prevent himself for admiring the evil he fights against. Moreover, he does not seem totally conscious of the paradox. Of course, attributing omnipotence to one’s opponent is not a very efficient way to fight him. I cannot resist the urge to quote the French essayist Pascal Bruckner who, without any reference to Orwell, accuses radical anti-capitalism of this same defect: *“Capitalism is referred to as a supremely clear-minded entity, able to foresee every move and to avoid every attack. It is supposed to have the same intuition and omnipotence [?] as the Devil. Its name is nobody but its violence is everywhere and its accomplices are legion. He’s responsible for all wearinesses, for all illnesses and for our loves that fail...”*⁹.

Maybe the picture is a bit exaggerated : Bruckner’s argument is rhetorical too. But for what I can see, it definitely contains an element of truth.

I am referring to the blindness of radical protest movement as far as their own victories are concerned. For instance, if we take the reaction of the pacifist movement (who almost deserted the scene after the beginning of the war in Irak): the reflections that could be heard at that time was that all the demonstrations were useless, since the war finally took place. Very few in the movement did realize that they had very much complicated the task of those leaders who were in favour of the war. Of course it was not a success in the technical sense of the term. But it contributed to the diplomatic isolation of pro-war governments and it sowed the seed of a possible global public opinion, which was celebrated by sociologists of globalization, but of which very little could be seen until then.

This is my impression of the dominant tone of *Le Monde diplomatique*, for instance, which is the most widespread medium of the anticapitalist left – at least in the French-speaking world; the only normal feeling you can have after reading it is some kind of desperate rage – at least if you share the main political vision of the paper. In a more personal

⁸ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989 [1949]), p. 268.

⁹ My translation from Pascal Bruckner : *Misère de la prospérité* (Paris : Grasset, 2002), p. 68

and intuitive way, it often seems to me that the only decent feeling you may have about the world inside this political sector is some mixture of anger and despair. Anything which could resemble hope is seen either as naïvety or, worse, as betrayal : the simple fact of seeing hope must be the sign that you have already conceded too much to the enemy.

But I recognize that this argument is shaped for a particular political opinion showing an inner contradiction in its global “imaginary” : you cannot at the same time rationally want to get rid of a powerful enemy and dedicate all your critical work to convince yourself and others that it is *all*-powerful. Either you are sure it is, and the best thing to do is to try to love it just as Winston does at the end of *1984*. Or it is not, or at least you are not sure it is, and the best thing to do is to seek the weaknesses that can be used against it.

- My second argument is also of a normative kind, but it is more universal. Conspiracy theory, and particularly the theory of the “masters of the world”, eventually prevents all rational political discussion, because the simple fact that you doubt this omnipotence shows you are probably “manipulated” by the enemy.

For instance, let us take the political philosopher Michael Walzer, whose position about the international policy of the USA is, I concede, not very coherent with his own commitment to *reiterative universalism*. I think it would be a good idea for European intellectuals to enter into a public debate with Michael Walzer, to throw light on what appears to me a contradiction. Instead, he was simply treated – again in *Le Monde diplomatique* – in the old-fashioned Stalinist way, as a *servant of imperialism*. I quote : “*The 11th of September is one of those moments of truth, where the articulation between academic sophistication and the defense of a determined ideology, in this case the imperial ideology of the United States, is particularly well unveiled, among certain philosophers.*”

Let us consider a more caricatural example but an interesting one. About one year ago I received a Troskyst pamphlet accusing the social forum of Porto Alegre of being a great manipulation in favour of neo-liberalism. The charge ? They had authorized French socialists to take part in the meeting.

The argument is well known : if you doubt my position, it is because you are in the enemy’s camp. If you express doubts about the existence of the conspiracy, it is because you are part of it. At this point, there is no need any more of considering each other’s arguments. So, no need for a discussion.

- I return to my question : what is wrong with conspiracy theory ? I gave two arguments on normative grounds, but they seem to me second best arguments. The main reason should be that conspiracy theory is *empirically* faulted, that it is a wrong way to conceive and describe the social world, a – sometimes useful – fantasy but a *false one*. The main reason should be an empirically sustainable *ontology* of the social world.

Thinking again, this is not so easily established. After all, as Popper himself says, *there are* conspiracies. And sometimes, conspiratory explanations appear at least rational. Let us consider this example cited by Martin Parker : “*Lee Richards, writing in the home produced Stoke-On-Rent UFO Magazine **Beyond the blue book** (1998) suggests that the Roswell incident was faked by the US government. This was in order to convince other governments – primarily the USSR – that USA had alien technology, and hence gain a strategic advantage in any potential hostilities. My point here is that this is a perfectly credible*

*explanation, one which relies on many features of the world which most of us assume and that does not invoke any agency or mechanism which we don't have knowledge of"*¹⁰.

So my normative arguments are of little impact if I am in front of a public who is convinced that we *effectively are* in a world where an all-powerful minority, in a more or less hidden way, governs everything, manipulating us and deceiving us whenever this is necessary. And there is a good reason to believe that, at least marginally, this description is not totally false either. To quote Martin Parker again: *"there is nothing particularly surprising about the idea of wealthy industrialists and politicians meeting in secret to discuss matters of common concern. Indeed it would be rather surprising if they did not attempt to use their power in concert to achieve outcomes that they collectively believed to be desirable"*¹¹.

So, how can we go further ? I was convinced that I simply had to riffle through the books written by all those sociologists who have, together, built up what I call a ***sociological theory of contingency*** : Merton in the thirties, Popper and Hayek in the fifties, Thomas Schelling in the sixties, Boudon and Elster from the seventies till now and, with them, Jean-Pierre Dupuy; or in the structuration theory of Giddens, or in theories of sociologists of postmodernity like Bauman and Beck. I could not push those investigations too far for reasons already mentioned, but it appears clearly that those authors are ultimately of very little help. Because the concepts and theories I summarized under the word "contingency" were never conceived as a weapon against conspiracy theories: they were shaped as weapons against *causal determinism* and *functionalism*.

We find in that literature a lot of argument to disqualify functionalism as a hidden teleology. Or to dismiss causal determinism as an "oversocialized view" of the social agent. But, most often, conspiracy theory in the general sense of intentional self conscious agents organizing together in order to dominate the social world, is simply dismissed as *magic thought*. Why this lack of argument ? Probably because the idea of a "ghost in the machine" of the social world, that's to say a social world entirely shaped by intentional behaviour was precisely the obstacle social sciences had to overcome to constitute their own object. Social world was conceived from the beginning as external to any unified intentionality, be it by structuralism, functionalism or hermeneutics to retain the typology of Giddens¹². The *autonomy* of the social world, in the words of Jean-Pierre Dupuy¹³ is the very condition for the existence of social sciences. So this autonomy itself was not really put into question. Rather, the debates organized around another question : had this autonomy to be based on an *ontological specificity* of the social (social facts are things as said Durkheim) or the result of *individually based processes*, the individual remaining ontological "more fundamental" than the social.

So while objectivist social sciences were trying to demonstrate that social facts are "things" of their own irreducible to any individual consciousness, subjectivist social science, and in particular methodological individualism were trying to disqualify functional explanations as "intentional explanations without intentional agent". Nobody had time to loose arguing against this simple view of the social world as the result of "intentional

¹⁰ Martin Parker, "Human Science as a Conspiracy Theory" in Parker and Parish (ed.) : *The Age of Anxiety. Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 201

¹¹ Martin Parker, op. cit.

¹² Anthony Giddens : *La constitution de la société*, Paris, PUF, 1987 (1984), p. 49-50.

¹³ Jean-Pierre Dupuy : *Introduction aux sciences sociales*, Paris, Ellipses, 1990

explanation whith an intentional agent”, namely the idea of an intentional plot, excepted to say that this view was paranoïd.

So in the measure social sciences dedicate some times to conspiracy theory, it was to “explain it away”, that’s to say finding reasons (or, often causes) that explained why people could have (false) beliefs about conspiracy.

There would be a lot to say about this, but it does not seem relevant to my point. We can always trace back any belief, ture or false to an explanation. Explaining why people do have some beliefs is *definitely not* the same thing as assessing the validity of those beliefs even, if the process by which the belief is formed may give some clues about it.

So what are we left with ? In the absence of any decisive argument against the idea of world governed by a handfull of all-powerfull “masters”, there can only be a more fragile and subtle work of assessing the implausibility of it. That means showing we don’t need such an hypothesis to explain the injustices and evils we discover in the world. And compare different scripts to see which seems more appropriate to explain our world or to guess where it goes.

This is the reason why novels are important and the way we use them is worth investigating